Interview with John E. Hall

Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

JOHN E. HALL

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Q: This is a Foreign Affairs Oral History interview with John Hall. It's the ninth of January 1998. I'm Raymond Ewing. This is being conducted at the National Foreign Affairs Training Center for the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training. John, I see that you joined the Foreign Service in 1962. Why don't you tell me a little bit about how you got interested in the Foreign Service, what your background was before you entered, and what your hopes and aspirations were at that point?

HALL: I grew up in Niagara Falls, New York and was the only son of a family that was certainly not wealthy, in a time when travel overseas was not the commonplace that it has since become for a lot of people. I grew up on the Canadian border and traveled frequently across that border into Canada, but until I joined the Foreign Service I had never traveled to any other foreign country.

My interest stems from my days in college when I ended up studying political science and specifically what has come to be called international relations. As I was approaching my senior year and had no particular idea of what I was going to do with myself afterwards, along came a recruiter from the State Department. He made an interesting presentation, I took an exam in December of my senior year, took an oral exam in the spring of my senior

year, and joined the Service three months after I graduated. I'm not sure there was ever a real plan in my own mind; one event led to another and pretty soon I was in this parking garage at Arlington Towers...

Q: At age 21.

HALL: Yes, at age 21 and very happy to be there. Now that it's all over after 35 years, I cannot imagine another career I would rather have had.

Q: You were at Kenyon College in Ohio...

Hall: Correct.

Q: Growing up in Niagara Falls, on the border with Canada, at that time, of course, we had a consulate in Niagara Falls, Canada. Were you aware of that or visit it?

HALL: I did not visit it, I was certainly aware of its being there. Of course, it shut down a few years after I joined the Service. Many years later I ended up in Toronto for a while, which was then the nearest post to my hometown, which was sort of interesting for that reason. I don't think I was assigned there because I was the local boy, but it was fun to be back home for a while.

Q: You entered the Foreign Service in 1962, and you had the usuaA-100 training course, and then what happened to you?

HALL: French language, to get off what was then not called probation but what was in fact probation. My first tour— which didn't seem to be all that unusual in my class, but which I gather just doesn't happen anymore— my first tour was in Washington, where I rotated among several bureaus, a couple of elements of A, PER, and EUR. I basically did my rotational tour in Washington. In 1965 I went to Bordeaux.

Q: The rotational tour in Washington, was that focused in one arein administration, or personnel management, or...

HALL: No, well, I did not have the feeling that it was. Every few months my counselor in what was then PER/POD would call me and say, “You've been in this place for so long, what would you like to do next time?” And we'd talk about it. I didn't have the feeling that there was any rhyme or reason for it from his side, and there was certainly none from mine. I ended up, curiously enough, being Swiss Desk officer for several months, I worked on a special project that had to do with determining pay scales, if I remember, I worked in PER/POD itself in the European Assignments Division, assigning what were then called Staff Corps personnel. There were one or two other incarnations in there. I was on the Congo Desk - then the Zaire Desk - a while... So I sort of “flitted around” from place to place, and I think from my point of view, of course, this was all to give me a broad range of experiences. I never had the feeling that there was an organized plan. It just sort of happened.

Q: I also had a Washington assignment at the beginning, right after training, and I always felt that I had a better understanding of how the Department works, of how foreign policy is made, and the problems and opportunities in Washington. It was useful. Generally, as you say, over the years initial assignments have been overseas, but of course, that is the Foreign Service, you can argue it both ways.

HALL: I think for me at the time, Ray, I was 21 years old, I'd never held a real job, those two years helped indoctrinate me in what the Department is in more ways than one. And it also helped me to get used to the concept of work. When I actually went to Bordeaux, the sequence had been the correct one. Nowadays the typical hire is in their thirties, they have some work experience, they know a little bit of the world and the workplace. Those were things that I didn't have. That initial Washington assignment grounded me in a way that

was extremely valuable when I got overseas. When I went off to Bordeaux it was a very small post: we had to sink or swim together, and the Washington service paid off.

Q: In Bordeaux, you probably did consular work, visa work, and little bit of everything?

HALL: A little bit of everything, that's right. At the time that I arrived there, there were two junior officers, one of those two slots was eliminated when the other one left, taking the post from four officers to three. I did pretty much everything there was to do, including visa work. And again, like the Washington assignment, which was a mixture of different experiences, that was a very small staff, a lot of sink or swim. My superiors there were not terribly interested in the details of consular work or administration, which was good for me, although it left me feeling very inadequate many times, but it was baptism by fire.

Q: It also gave you a good chance to reinforce your French.

HALL: Without question.

Q: And you were there what, two years?

HALL: Two years, then went on to Reykjavik, where I was the second person in the Economic Section. Nominally called the commercial officer but then, as I suspect now, there wasn't really that much trade with Iceland. Also did the consular work as a part-time occupation and back-stopped the administrative officer. Again, a very small post and over time one did just about everything.

Q: You probably did some fish reporting.

HALL: Oh, of course... the good old cod count.

Q: Wasn't there a cod war going on at that time?

HALL: Not at that moment. We were between wars. The British were not totally out of favor at that time. But we have a naval base on Iceland, and for us there was a good deal of interest in why it was that the Russian embassy in Iceland had to be so large, why it needed so many vehicles with high antennas on them... all things like that. We managed to operate somehow with a very small embassy reinforced by 3,000 sailors.

Q: But you weren't directly involved in the politico-military basrelations.

HALL: No.

Q: Who was the ambassador in Iceland at that time?

HALL: For most of my time it was the former governor of Minnesota, Carl Rolvaag, who was really very, very good and had a not totally irrelevant ethnic connection. But also just was a very warm, gentle man who dealt with Icelanders very well. Shortly before I left, he was replaced by Luther Replogle, which was an unfortunate assignment, but those things happen. And I left shortly after Mr. Replogle got there.

Q: And where did you go from there, John?

HALL: From there back here into FSI's Economic Studies Program, then to the Department of Commerce on a detail as the France Desk officer for two years. After that, German language training, then off to Bern as the second of two commercial officers. That was at the time when State's commercial work overseas...

Q: And you were there with your German language training, and welas your economic and Commerce Department experience...

HALL: And my French. Which language I found myself then ansubsequently using more than my German.

Q: Is that partly because many of the German-speaking Swiss werquite adequate in English?

HALL: Yes, and in fact were quite comfortable and anxious to speak it, whereas it was my experience that the Francophone Swiss, even if adequate in English, preferred not to use it.

Q: Of course your German allowed you to read _____ anthere were certainly times where German was useful...

HALL: Oh, without question. Certainly on both of my assignments in Switzerland, I did public speaking in German and things like that. I found as a general rule that I got more mileage out of my French. In fact, when I was DCM in Bern at one point I sent in a cable recommending that my own position be language-designated in French rather than German, simply because I felt, not because I had both, but that in that particular role French was the more important of the two languages. Not to my surprise, the recommendation was never enacted.

Q: As I served with you at the same time, but only for two years in its earlier incarnation, while you were at the Commercial Section, I felt the same way, except that, unlike you at that time I did not have any French and I wished I did. There were certainly many occasions where it would have proved useful and valuable, whereas the German was certainly helpful at times, but I'm not sure it was essential.

HALL: Well, the idea was to have both... you know, Ray, as well as I do the caliber of the FSN staff there. And we certainly had ready access to informal translations of the local papers, for example. It's preferable to read them yourself in the original if you could, but you always had that to fall back on.I found that on the streets it was French that I used more often.

Q: Since you did come back later on as the Deputy Chief of Mission why don't we leave Switzerland aside at this point as you may have some reflections that cover both periods of your assignment, and go on to where did you go from Bern? That was about 1976.

HALL: We were three and a half years in Bern and then were transferred to Wellington where I was the sole commercial officer, and simultaneously the sort of number two in Econ... That was a particularly unusual transfer for us because we were going to the Southern Hemisphere from the Northern. And I was replaced in Bern in the summer of 1976, but the person whom I was replacing was not leaving Wellington until the turn of the year.

Q: So you overlapped

HALL: I overlapped for several weeks, but then I had an opportunity to do something that is very rare in this business, and that is an opportunity to actually use home leave. My family and I probably used about two months of home leave in that period. As well as some sort of makeshift little assignments in Washington to fill some of that time, as well as overlaps on both ends. But then in our business you're usually rushing to get to a vacant job, and here I was slowing down not to get to a job that was already covered.

Q: And not to get there too soon. I hope you enjoyed it, because ayou said, it's very rare.

HALL: I certainly did.

Q: And you went by boat from San Francisco?

HALL: From Frisco to Tahiti, and then flew from Tahiti to Wellington.

Q: This was 1976; probably one of the last transfers by sea.

HALL: I shouldn't be surprised, yes.

Q: What was New Zealand like for a commercial officer at that time?It seems like the market must have been somewhat small.

HALL: The market was small, and very much centered on Europe, as I suspect it remains today to a considerable degree. Quite honestly, there was not a lot to do there. In commercial work, like the other forms of our work, you can easily fill up time if you try. Realistically, I don't think there was much chance for the U.S. government to intervene productively on behalf of U.S. suppliers to New Zealand customers. As a result, we undertook at least one initiative which worked out very well. That was the promotion of tourism. New Zealanders travel extensively. They are a relatively isolated country geographically and they are psychologically aware of that isolation. A New Zealand youth of 18, 19, 20 years invariably makes a long overseas tour. The pattern had been that you make a tour to the mother country and then from the mother country make sorties into the rest of Western Europe. Then a year or so later, you come back home and settle down. So the phenomenon of overseas travel was quite normal: everybody did it. So we went in and managed to get support of U.S. Travel Service and various elements of U.S. travel industry to take some interest in tourism from New Zealand, which worked out well. There was a lot of press attention, to what extent we had a local press. We introduced into that small market some U.S. suppliers that would never have thought of it. And we gave publicity to the idea that there is somewhere other than the U.K. that is interesting for travel.

Q: Did U.S. airlines serve New Zealand at that time?

HALL: It's been an on-and-off thing. American has been in and out, Pan Am has been in and out, United has been in and out. I think, at the time I was there Pan Am was in. But Air New Zealand cooperated with us in this venture, Qantas cooperated with us, and we got some of the domestic carriers in the U.S. to hook up, too. We had pretty good support once we had established our identity. And combined with the more classic forms

of commercial work, that made for a satisfying assignment. And, as I say, in addition I was helping out with the economic work, which was fun.

Q: Did you do a lot of economic reporting?

HALL: Sort of filling in gaps that the senior economic officer wasn't interested in or didn't have time for. We had an agricultural attach# there as well, so in fact there was a lot of reporting capability for that very small country. And I was certainly the least experienced of the three in reporting, so I tended to get bits and pieces, but that was fine.

Q: Did you have any regional responsibilities at that time, beyonNew Zealand?

HALL: The embassy at that time covered Samoa and the Cook Islands. I got one trip to Samoa and Tonga, but with those island-states there was really very little to our bilateral relationship at all. There were of course connections between American Samoa and Western Samoa, but they didn't need someone in Wellington to administer them. Otherwise these were very small states, and the ambassador would visit a couple times a year, and subordinate staff might go occasionally, but there was not really very much business.

Q: How about Antarctica?

HALL: I did not get down there, some members of the embassy staff did. Those operations were based in Christchurch, and they worked quite independently of us which is probably the correct way to do it. Their working relationship with New Zealanders and others was very, very good, they didn't need us to run interference, and we had no formal responsibility for them.

Q: And how long were you in New Zealand?

HALL: That again came to be three and a half years, and then back to Washington once more, where I went again into PER, followed that up with a tour in AF's Regional Economic Office. That, in turn, led to Monrovia.

Q: Let's see, in personnel you were involved with training liaison?

HALL: That was part of what was then called FCA, the training shop of the career development office. So a lot of connections with FSI. Our little shop was the one that selected people for long-term training programs for area studies, economics, Cox, and other fellowships, so a lot of connection with FSI, and indeed it was in that role that I became aware of the Canadian Defense College — what it was, and how it operated, and I sort of tucked that information away for future reference. Eventually I somehow found myself getting assigned there. An institution that most of the people in the Foreign Service never heard of and would never think to investigate; I happened to know something about it.

Q: I'd like to talk more about that in a minute but before we get there let's just finish up. You say you were in the African bureau focusing on what, economic affairs?

HALL: I was the deputy director of their regional economic office for two years. I think it was understood earlier than it was enunciated that I would end up following that assignment by being the economic counselor in Monrovia. And so for my second year in that office I was very heavily involved in understudying and researching and dealing with our economic relationship with Liberia. I was, I think, everybody's informal choice but nobody did anything formal about it until the assignment cycle began.

Q: The economic relationship with Liberia, certainly among the nations of Africa, is certainly unique and special for the United States.

HALL: Special for Liberia, that's for sure... special for us, too, suppose.

Q: As compared with other states in Africa.

HALL: Oh yes, there is baggage there.

Q: When did you go there, to Monrovia.

HALL: Eighty-four to '86 was my assignment there.

Q: And what was the setting then? The government of Liberia waunder whom?

HALL: Samuel K. Doe and his group had assassinated Tolbert and his government ministers in 1980. By the time I went there, to the extent anyone could claim to have control in Liberia, it was probably Doe.

Q: But the civil war and Charles Taylor...

HALL: That all came later. And eventually Doe himself became his own victim. For the most part it was a peaceful place while I was there, in security terms.

Q: Your family was there?

HALL: No, I went alone. We had a son who was in 11th and 12th grade in those two years and we just didn't think that was a wise move. So I went on a separated tour. The place was relatively tranquil, but as in many parts of Africa it was many countries woven into one. There was, of course, the capital city. The vast rest of the country, for the most part the central government in the capital city had little contact with. Little influence over. To the extent that political activity happened, it was pretty well concentrated in the capital city. To the extent that there was economic activity, it was there, and at the sites of the major plantations and mines, all run by expatriates.

Q: Europeans as opposed to Americans?

HALL: Europeans and Americans, and indeed one of the plantations, I must be honest, was owned by a U.K. interest but run by a Malaysian. All run by ex-pats. And of course the petty commerce in the country was in the hands of Lebanese and Syrian ex-pats. There were occasional troubles in some of the outlying areas, but they certainly never impacted on me and never really impacted on embassy personnel. Even the AID people and certainly the embassy people rarely left the capital... We didn't have project personnel in the rural areas, although we had a substantial Peace Corps presence there. We had a large AID program although most of that was ESF, so it didn't involve project personnel in the field. I don't think our people were ever impacted by troubles that arose in the countryside. Come the late '80s and '90s when Charles Taylor and so on became forces, then I think that situation changed. But when I was there it was a relatively peaceful period.

Q: Who was the ambassador?

HALL: Bill Swing during my first year, and Ed Perkins during my second.

Q: And the DCM?

HALL: Len Shurtleff in both years.

Q: Perkins had earlier been DCM, had he not?

HALL: That's right. Neither Ambassador Swing nor Ambassador Perkins had an easy task in Liberia. By the time I arrived at post, Swing was in his fourth year as ambassador. He had gone in shortly after Doe took over and established, by all accounts, a very good personal relationship with this neophyte, had coached him. Swing was often referred to as the proconsul.

But Doe, as he gained experience and confidence, came to realize that Swing was advising him in Washington's interest and according to Washington's expectations, and not in Doe's. And so he began to distance himself from Ambassador Swing. As the

relationship became more strained over time, it became more uncomfortable for Swing. Eventually he concluded, and the Department concurred, that he had contributed what he could to the situation, which had been a very great deal.

The situation on the ground having evolved, which was to be expected, it was time for a change at the embassy, and Mr. Perkins was that change. Whereas Mr. Swing's approach had been to try to make things work by coaching and nurturing and guiding, Perkins' mandate was to be tough - to play hardball. The relationship changed very much in 1985 when that change of incumbent occurred. It changed in part because of personalities, but principally because of politics and changed expectations back home.

Q: Politics in the U.S. in what sense?

HALL: We became progressively more annoyed at having the Liberians consciously and deliberately frustrate our ambitions and aspirations for them. They began to defy us. A lot of people were taking shots at our Liberia policy, reinforced by the widening gap between what we and the IMF and others wanted the Liberian government to do and what it did. There was still a lot of sympathy for the Americo-Liberian memories and the prominent personalities of that era still living (many of them in exile in Washington). The Doe regime was viewed variously as malicious, inept, and certainly bloodstained. Congressional committees, NGOs, the IMF/IBRD were disillusioned, felt they had been ill-used by Doe and his cohorts. As they had.

During that year in Washington when I was learning the Liberia account, I had the opportunity to chat with a number of these interested parties. I found growing hostility to the Doe regime, even among those who once had placed high hopes in it. Great sympathy for Liberia, but great hostility toward Doe.

Q: Probably a lot of that went back to the time Sergeant Doe seizepower, killing leaders of the previous regime.

HALL: Without question. The image of the bullet-ridden bodies tied to poles on the beach was very vivid. We had conveniently deluded ourselves into believing that Liberia had been a peaceful place for centuries until Doe struck. Liberia had been a model we held up to the rest of Africa, an offspring of which we were proud. Suddenly, we found that it wasn't the model, wasn't the stepchild, we wanted.

Q: You mentioned before the special relationship, as far as the Liberians were concerned, who looked to the United States in a way that other African countries had never experienced, because of the unique history and background. At the time you were there, in the economic realm, was that special relationship pretty much the same as it had been, or was it beginning to change? Could it have changed even more? By now, it's disappeared, it's gone pretty much. How was it then? Firestone was still there?

HALL: The special relationship always meant much more in Liberia than it did in the United States. There it was both a psychological crutch for the Americos (who, after all, prided themselves on not being “native” to their country) and the promise (occasionally fulfilled) of money and other forms of sustenance. To a few Americans, the special relationship had theological significance; to most who knew of it, it was an annoyance which we could occasionally draw upon to make us feel good; to the vast majority of Americans, the phrase and the concept were totally without meaning.

At the beginning of his regime, I think that Doe saw the special relationship certainly in terms of cash and guns, but also in terms avuncular. Bill Swing succeeded in his early years in making it all that. But the honeymoon could not, and did not, last.

As for the private sector, Firestone was indeed still there in my time, as was the old Uniroyal plantation which had been taken over and was being run by a small group of private American investors; senior on-the-ground management there, also, was American. In addition, the Lamco iron mine in northern Liberia, a joint Swedish-American venture, was run at Nimba by an American head. There were also a few private American

investors-cum-businesspeople, who were generally also cum-shyster. There were three American-run banks, and the fabled Liberian ship registry was run by a subsidiary of one of those banks out of Reston, Virginia.

So there was a noteworthy private-sector American presence and connection. In addition, there was a clear preference for American goods in the stores and for American connections by local traders; the only frozen foods available in the supermarkets, for instance, were Giant brand. So the “special relationship” had its private-sector economic aspect, made possible by its political aspect - and by the relative stability of the Americo period. All that has since changed, I suspect.

Q: In the notes you gave me last month, you mentioned that while in Monrovia aseconomic counselor you provided facts on the basis of which we might have cut the special relationship cord, had we had the to courage to do so. I'd be interested if you would elaborate on what you meant by that, what you did, maybe what wasn't done that could have been done at the time.

HALL: I inherited from Dane Smith, my predecessor, a close and correct relationship with the key government economic ministers and officials. In addition, at that time, there were several AID and IMF advisors in various economic ministries, and the IMF had a resident representative who was very active and very alert. Putting it all together, we had many good sources. In that sort of society, you never have totally reliable access to information on all things, but we did pretty well.

The main focus at the time was on economic management. Nature made Liberia a rich country; her leadership made it a poor one. Resources were being exploited, but the proceeds were being diverted. It's the tragedy of many countries, but because of the special relationship, much of the world viewed this country as our responsibility. And the Liberian leadership liked having us in that hot seat. By the time I arrived, Doe and his team had become pretty adept at hiding things, at covering their tracks, at obfuscation. We

weren't ever 100 percent informed, but we knew enough to be able to guess most of the rest.

I saw my role as being to ferret out all I could, piece it together, double-check whenever possible, and report factually. We inserted very little commentary in the reporting the Economic Section did; the facts were all the commentary we needed. The facts we reported, particularly when spliced together with those being reported by the IMF representative and, to a lesser degree, the resident IBRD representative, clearly showed that our advice was not being followed, or efforts to improve economic management were being ignored, and our aid and other programs aiming at those ends were being frustrated. Deliberately, positively, consciously, aggressively, knowingly frustrated. Washington's expectations, and the reality in Monrovia, were very far apart by late 1984. And in my judgement, the perception of a very close relationship between us and Liberia was harming our image in Africa at that moment.

By the end of 1985, I sensed that Washington knew that it had enough information to see clearly the consistent pattern and that, had it wanted to cut Liberia loose, free itself from the millstone of Liberia, it could have justified the act. Such a debate did occur here, and in the end the posture which was settled on was to try to tough it out. Ed Perkins brought a “get tough” message, and, of course, Doe's eventual demise and the chaos which preceded (and followed) it, made a difficult situation even more so.

There is one fact about the special relationship should not be lost sight of. From the 1830s until the 1940s, it was really an empty phrase - nothing more than a state of mind among the Americos. There was no measurable, quantifiable substance to it at government level. Liberia became a very convenient and willing ally in World War II, and since then the relationship has become more than just words. But until the Doe regime, that substance was economic only, and largely in the private sector. Only since 1980 has it had a more comprehensive content.

Q: You know I was in Ghana from 1989 to 1992, and my sense was at that time from the Ghanaians, they thought that we, the United States, whether government, or people, or what, had a history and, ergo, a responsibility vis # vis Liberia that was unique. It wasn't exactly the same way they saw Paris' responsibility and interest in Francophone Africa, but it was close. And I think they thought - again, civil war broke out and things began to happen there - at that time, of course, you had long since gone on to other things, but we had turned our back and were certain that were discharging the proper level of interest now. I may have misunderstood or misread it, and it was a different period, but I think they thought that we could or should have done more, because we had this history with Liberia.

HALL: Many Liberians felt the same way at that time, and when I was there. But at the time I was there, you were hearing those remarks more from the economic class - which has prospered under the Americos, and wanted us to oust Doe - than from Doe and his companions. The Doe government by my time was using the idea of the special relationship to try to prod resources, and forgiveness, and the turning of a blind eye, out of us.

I think they key is that everyone was dissatisfied with us, as we were with the Doe regime. Even we were dissatisfied with ourselves. The choice before us was to identify the least objectionable, the least painful, course, in a setting and at a time when we were being played for suckers. In my view, we chose an inferior option, but I acknowledge that it was a perplexing dilemma with no easy way out.

Q: It certainly is fair to say that in the period when you were there, and throughout Liberian history, the role of the American embassy differed from that of any other embassy in Monrovia.

HALL: That's correct. In my day, we were larger than all the other embassies put together. The others were insignificant in size, in role, in purpose. To their home governments, they

were - virtually all of them - marginal. I and my colleagues had very little contact with them. Actually, the International School was the one place where some contact did occur.

Q: Let's talk a bit more about the expatriate business community, particularly the rubber and mining interests. Were they under a lot of pressure? Were they beginning to scale down in your time there?

HALL: By the time I arrived, Uniroyal had sold out to a private consortium of some of its own executives, and Goodyear had sold out to a British firm. Otherwise, the American presence which went in during and after the Second War was intact.

Firestone dominated all. It employed forty thousand people, principally on its plantation, which was huge, but also in the Coca-Cola bottling plant, the paint factory, the various import firms, the shipping line, the trucking company, and so on which it owned. They also ran one of the major ports.

There were two major iron mines - Bong, which was German-owned, and LAMCO, the joint Swedish-American venture. And there were several timber plantations and sawmills, all foreign-owned - largely Lebanese and Syrian expats [expatriates] in those cases.

In my time, each of them was worried about the future, but each of them had a good thing going at the moment, and Doe and Company knew enough to let them continue to make money. The investors knew how to share that money, and that kept them safe. I assume that with civil war, most of those (with the possible exception of some of the Lebanese and Syrians, who had nowhere else to go) pulled out.

Q: How involved were you with the neighboring countries?

HALL: In political/security terms, there was always rivalry/friction across the Liberia/Sierra Leone border. Indeed, the “attempted coup” which occurred while I was there came from Sierra Leone. In its detail, it was straight out of Laurel and Hardy, but it gave Doe an

excuse to jail some of his detractors. Small, disorganized, dissident groups from any one of these countries might occasionally seek temporary refuge in another, but that didn't amount to much in toto.

North of the LAMCO mine runs another vein of iron ore which crosses the border with Guinea. Loosely called “Mifergui,” this resource is occasionally the subject of speculation as to whether the two governments might cooperate to permit its exploitation. LAMCO was interested, as were some French interests, and others. But when the one government waxed hot, the other waxed cool, over the decades. That continued in my time, but it was the spur to a visit I made to Conakry to talk with Guinean officials just to find out more about the topic.

With those two exceptions, there was little cross-border activitwhich involved our embassies in any of the four countries at issue.

Q: What about the security situation in Monrovia?

HALL: Now and then, individual soldiers or small groups of them turned into hooligans for a short while. I found myself looking down the barrel of a rifle once or twice, but I knew that the soldiers were rarely given bullets for fear that they might use them on their officers. There was often tension in Monrovia in my time, fear that things would happen. But they rarely did.

Doe and his henchmen were of the Krahn tribe, a small up-country group. Most of the garrison in the Monrovia area were Krahns, and the people of Monrovia mostly were not. Tribalism was alive and well in Liberia then, as I am sure it is now, and one can legitimately view Doe's takeover, and his subsequent overthrow, in tribal terms. Incidentally, like it or not, cannibalism is also alive and well in Liberia. Once overthrown, Doe became lunch.

Q: Was there a large private American community in Liberia in youtime there?

HALL: The official Americans numbered several hundred, even excluding the Peace Corps volunteers. There were several score American missionaries, most of whom were so committed that they would not think of leaving whatever might happen. There must have been thirty or forty Americans associated with Firestone, plus others attached to the other firms. But all in all, not many in the private sector. There were, of course, many Americo-Liberians who held American passports - dual nationals. I am not counting them.

Q: When we were together in Bern, you were in the Commercial Section. You had considerable commercial experience by the time you arrived in Liberia. Was there an active commercial program at the embassy there?

HALL: In a word, no. Commerce paid for two FSNs, and State paid for a local-hire American (in my time, the wife of an AID officer), who functioned nominally as a commercial officer. But in fact that person was the third economic officer at the post. After the Americo period, it would have been a very rare circumstance in which we could honestly recommend to any American firm not already operating there that they seriously consider doing business in Liberia. The total climate was simply not conducive.

Before we leave Liberia, I would like to mention one small but amusing point. Doe had been an Army sergeant, but promoted himself to five-star general; no one argued with the promotion at the time it happened. Each minister in the Doe cabinet was made an Army major, both to keep them in their place to him and to provide them with a second official income. The major who was Minister of Finance during most of my time in Monrovia never served in the real Liberian Army, but he would come to the office occasionally in full dress uniform - complete with plumed cocked hat and sword. Seeing him getting into and out of his car, or into and out of his office chair, was a treat.

Q: We're now in the summer of '86 and after two years in Liberia,where did you go then?

HALL: I went on then to the Canadian Defense College, to a program that has since been shut down by the Canadians, having been a very costly program for them to operate. But the way the Department handled the assignment was that year was considered a year of area studies, preceding an assignment in Canada very wise way to look at it, I believe. I went to the college knowing that I would then go on to Toronto afterwards, as indeed I did. Each year the State Department student at the college then went in to one of our posts in Canada.

Q: About how big was the college, in terms of students?

HALL: Forty-three students, 12 were Canadian military colonels, two of whom made brigadier general during the course. There were representatives from a few other Canadian government agencies, but not very many - one from External Affairs. There were seven foreign students - I was one, and all the others were uniformed military. One Brit, one Australian, one New Zealander, three from the U.S., one from the Foreign Service. The remainder, which is to say probably half of the students, were either from provincial or municipal governments or from the Canadian private sector — not many from the private sector, but a few. One of the students, as an example, was a news reporter from the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, who simply took a year off from reporting to go to the National Defense College. Another was a priest from the staff of the Archbishop of Toronto who spent a year at the course. And having concluded the course he went back to Toronto where he became what he called President of the Church of the North. Which is to say that from the Diocesan headquarters in Toronto he administered assistance programs to the churches in the Inuit areas where there was an extensive network of small mission churches. Barry was their central coordination point. So very interesting people at the college, an interesting mix, and I think a richer mix than we have in our War and Staff Colleges. It was an extremely expensive program; in a nine month college year we spent four months in travel status. We visited 20 foreign countries, every province, both territories... a very expensive program. And the Queen bore all the costs for all the

students. So in the end I think the program was just found to be too expensive in a country which at that time did not have much of a military, and certainly since then has shrunk its military even further.

Q: Do you know what senior Canadians do now in terms of higher-levetraining if this does not exist anymore?

HALL: I don't know if they do anything at all, quite honestly.

Q: At that time they presumably did send some senior officers to thUnited States or to Britain, to Fort McNair...

HALL: Yes, that's right. And I'm sure they still do. And I am not aware of anythinI must say, I'm not informed — within Canada recently that would supplant this.

Q: Remind me where the Canadian Defense College is located?

HALL: Kingston, Ontario, on the northern end of Lake Ontario, has always been the military hub point since long before the War of 1812. And there are an array of military establishments there, including their equivalent of West Point and this college. It was a one and a half or two hour drive from Ottawa, so it had fairly regular access to federal entities and people. There was infrastructure to support it, there was an airbase just a few miles down the road in terms of our travel program and getting in and out of the college. And of course there was ready access to the U. S., as well.

Q: You have your own faculty, as well as using visiting lecturers, suppose, from other...

HALL: They had a core faculty of uniformed military personnel, but they relied very heavily on outside lecturers. And I think that probably was not a small part of the cost. In Canadian terms, they got top level people; the most prominent members of Canadian society

addressed the College. And when you addressed the College you had to go there for a whole day, and that had to cost them something.

Q: And you mentioned travel. Very extensive travel?

HALL: Very extensive. Indeed, my understanding was the Canadian Air Force relied on the National Defense College for much of its training time, and certainly for the only experience its pilots got in flying to an awful lot of obscure destinations. They had no possible reasons to go to these places otherwise. We were usually flying in a C-130 which was not exactly comfortable, but functional, but every now and then we'd get a ministerial plane or something like that.

Q: And you went to Europe, or the Far East, or...

HALL: Sure, you name it, we went. We made five trips, one to each geographic continent, basically, two trips to the U.S., and then trips in Canada itself. We did all the provinces and both northern territories in three separate trips. So it's a great deal of travel. But in terms of preparation for an assignment in Canada, I don't think any other one-year program could have done what that one did. When I went to Toronto, maybe it was just me, but I felt that I could speak with Canadians in a way that I never felt that I could speak with any other foreign group. I felt that I could understand what they were sayinnot just the wordand that I could respond to them. I think that experience cheek-by-jowl with 30-odd literate Canadians for a full year was terribly instructive. No Canadian studies program at American University could do the same.

Q: And that experience really brought you into Canadian society at large, and certainly in Toronto, in particular. But it was more than just the contacts that you established...

HALL: It was the understanding. It was the ability to hear them and understand, and the ability to communicate with them. You know, I watched other officers around me struggling with what the newspaper meant when it said this or that. I usually felt pretty confident that

I knew what they were getting at - certainly in their commentary on the U.S. But also in terms of their dealings with each other, their commentary on international issues, their own domestic problems, that was tremendously instructive.

Q: It's probably valuable to the defense college and to Canadian students to have foreign students, to have Americans, to have not only the three uniformed service members, but to have somebody from the Foreign Service.

HALL: I think that we collectively brought a perspective that was useful to them. In the Canadian military, I think you know, the movement from colonel to brigadier is, theoretically at least, one that takes you a quantum leap into an entirely new universe and a new array of issues. And I think from their point of view this was very good preparation. By the time you become a brigadier general you are dealing with foreigners, there is no way to get around that. And I think to be a general officer in the Canadian services you have got to be able to work with foreigners. That is not true in ours, but it is imperative in the Canadian. And you have got to be able to work with civilian society - you can no longer isolate yourself on base or on shipboard. You have got to be able to interact with your own society. It was a very cleverly constructed student body. It certainly served the Ministry's purposes. It also happened to serve mine.

Q: And from the viewpoint of the Canadians — with their involvement with peacekeeping for the United Nations and in other ways, as well as their involvement with NATO and NORAD and all of these multilateral bodies — that training experience with foreigners and learning to work with them was valuable.

HALL: More than valuable, essential, absolutely essential. Q: And besides that, the year was probably a lot of fun.

HALL: A great deal of fun, no two ways around it. Canadians are great folks to have a beer with. And they're great folks to pick nits with. They certainly don't hesitate to shoot barbs our way, it's nice to shoot back. They enjoy it.

Q: So you went from Kingston to Toronto, which is how far?

HALL: About three hours, by car.

Q: And you were what in Toronto?

HALL: I went in as the economic officer, which was the number two. And then when the consul general left a few months later, I replaced him, but everyone understood when I got there that I was the successor. I think I dealt with him correctly and successfully. I don't think he ever felt threatened, but I did use those several months to sort of position myself for what I knew was coming. The college certainly gave me historical knowledge and understanding. It also gave me a number of absolutely superb contacts, contacts that even as principal officer I could not have had otherwise. And so I fairly systematically developed and maintained those contacts, with the result I think that by the time I became principal officer I was already very well positioned in that role. That was at a time when the Free Trade Agreement, which was then a two-country agreement, was in the discussion and negotiation stage. There was the possibility of a role for the principal officer in Toronto which far transcended managing a visa operation and auditing the books.

Q: Often in the past the principal officer in Toronto has been from the consular side of things, because historically that had been an important part of the post's operations.

HALL: And I think historically there were not a lot of issues. On the commercial side, the two countries are essentially one, and therefore the concept of trade promotion is almost ludicrous. On the economic side the linkages are intimate. The Canadians know us as well as we know ourselves, and quite possibly better. We, of course, know nothing about them, but that's an ongoing problem. But I think in most times managing a very busy visa

operation probably is what being the principal officer in Toronto is all about. I happened to come on the scene at a time when there was an issue and I think I got that job because I had, on paper, a credential that didn't seem totally irrelevant.

Q: Not only was there an issue, the negotiation of the free trade agreement, but I think one could argue that, even though the economies are intertwined, when problems arise in the relationship over the years much of the time they're in the economic realm.

HALL: Sure.

Q: And the solutions have to be found, and you need knowledgeablpeople to deal with that. I guess I support your assignment.

HALL: I think at the time it was right to have in the principal officer job someone who was prepared to look beyond the office. Over time, I suspect it largely was a management job. I think on my watch there was the potential for it to be an issues-related job.

In the Canadian structure the provinces are far more powerful than our states are. And they have the constitutional possibility to thwart almost any agreement the central government arrives at: trade or otherwise. So the authorities in Ottawa dare not enter into any international understanding without having figured out how they're going to handle the provinces. And of all the provinces Ontario was the most powerful, the most vocal, and on this issue it was the most negative. And it was the most negative for a variety of reasons, many of which had nothing to do with the issue. So I found myself responsible for our relationships with that entity in the Canadian system that was most staunchly positioning itself as an opponent to the very agreement that we so desperately wanted, and that Ottawa so desperately wanted.

Q: So you obviously needed to explain this to Washington and to our embassy in Ottawa, as well as trying to interpret and explain what we were doing to Ontario authorities.

HALL: I think that's true, it was a dual role, and the Canadian authorities in Ottawa perceived that there were definite limits in how they could propagandize vis-a-vis the Ontario authorities. There were all sorts of constitutional issues, there were rules around the fringes of this free trade proposal. And there were moments when the U.S. representative could say or do things that the federal Canadian authorities just can't do. And sometimes I was the one who had to do it. So it was a very interesting role to have. I went into it fairly confident in my understanding of what had gone before, through the college experience and during my understudy when I was at the post initially.

I went into it with some very good contacts - I had excellent relationship with the provincial premier, the deputy premier, the guys who were leading the charge - we were very good friends, and we had some very frank discussions, and very quickly got beyond the garbage and into the meat. And I think I was able to contribute some understanding to Washington which it might not have haor might not have believeotherwise. And maybe occasionally coached a little bit on what our policy would be at that moment in the evolution of things. It was interesting ballet to watch: Ottawa had to handle Toronto and we had to handle Toronto, and we had to do it in a way that we didn't get in each others' way.

Q: Were you directly involved in negotiations of this...

HALL: Not with the negotiations per se, but with the political side... and I guess you could say, a little bit with the politicking behind the scenes. I did some public speaking and made some public appearances in connection with the agreement, but no, my role was not to lead, my role was to explain, support, define.... But it was great fun, and I think that by the time I left that assignment in 1990 the contribution that a principal officer in Toronto could have made was made. The agreement was there, Ontario had staked out its position, we knew roughly what areas they were going to make trouble in and how they were going to do it. So I think I just happened to be in the right place at the right time.

Q: There's a few other times over the years that, having to do with things Canadian, that Washington officials prefer to deal directly, to pick up the phone: they speak English, they see things the same way, it's easier to do business with Canadians. Maybe we don't need our embassy in Ottawa to the same degree we need our embassy in Monrovia, say, or wherever. How do you feel about that?

HALL: At the time that I was in Toronto Tom Niles was in Ottawa as ambassador. I worked with Tom Niles, I saw him in pretty close quarters not infrequently, I had an awful lot of respect for Tom. Had he not been in Ottawa at that time when that issue was there, I think the embassy's role would have been very different, certainly much smaller. But I think he was one of the proofs that I have witnessed that ambassadoreven nocan make a difference. And I think he made a real difference. Niles was absolutely doing the right thing at that time. He made a major contribution to the way Washington handled that issue, and was basically indispensable.

So, yes, most times I think you probably could do without much of those operations. This happened to be a moment when there was something out of the ordinary and particularly in Tom Niles, you had an individual who was very much out of the ordinary. I think he was the right man at the right time.

Q: I think from what you said you also made a significancontribution dealing with Ontario.

HALL: No... Nothing like what Mr. Niles did. His contribution was at the White House level was very public; he was working with the Prime Minister and the President directly... Believe me, I was in a totally different area. I was able, I think, to do some things that were helpful and useful. I think he did things that were critical.

Q: How about the business community based on Toronto. Did you spend a lot of time with them, as well? In terms of supporting the free trade agreement negotiations as well as in other respects...

HALL: Oh, they're terribly influential. Absolutely. And the movement back and forth between the private business sector and the government - not just of people, but of ideas - is, I think, even greater than it is here. So if you're talking to a business executive today, in fact through that person you're talking to a government minister, or you're talking to an aide to a government minister tomorrow. People with influence in Canada exercise their influence over a lot of Canada's interest.

Yes, working with the business community is essential. Interestingly enough, one of the communities I tried to work with... I developed a very good relationship with the Cardinal, an excellent relationship with the chief rabbi, and I made overtures to the Protestant churches, which didn't work out quite so famously. But then the Protestant churches, particularly the United Church, which is the biggest one, are one of the hotbeds of anti-Americanism, so I wasn't too surprised at that. But, yes, I think I was able to move in a lot of areas, many of which were useful.

Q: The consul general in Toronto has a large consular district and a large staff, and a lot of visas, American citizen matters... Your subordinates and others pretty much took care of that, or did you travel quite a bit, were there other problems or issues that you had to deal with, or was this your preoccupation?

HALL: This was certainly my preoccupation, personally. The way the post was structured at the time, and it's since changed somewhat, the staff totaled about 80 people. I went in as the economic officer. Because I was already a senior officer, I became the second-ranking officer, of course. I was replaced by an 03 as economic officer, and that was exactly as it should have been. That left the head of the Consular Section as very clearly the second-ranking officer, an 01. I had the very good fortune to have two heads of the Consular Section in succession, each of whom was absolutely superb. And basically I left that function to them. I very quickly determined that I trusted them and I think they earned that trust. So they each had very big responsibilities in areas in which they were specialized, knowledge that I didn't have. With the support of my 03 economic officer and

our USIS officer, and of course contact with the embassy and so on, I could work on other things.

It did include a considerable amount of travel, although if you look at a map of Ontario, the vast bulk of that land surface is uninhabited. It is true that with a couple of exceptions, 90 percent of all Canadians live within 50 miles of the U.S. border, or something like that. And that's certainly true in Ontario. So where the decision makers were, where the industry heads were, where the things that interested me professionally were, all were within a relatively finite band. The rest of the province had very little interest to anyone except the curious, and I certainly classified myself among them, so I could get into those things, too. But business was within a fairly finite part of the province.

Q: Did you go to Ottawa on a regular basis?

HALL: I suppose I would have gotten up there every six or eight months... I had a very nice relationship, I felt, with the embassy. They gave me very little guidance, just let me do my thing. And part of keeping it that way, I thought, was to keep them in Ottawa and keep me in Toronto. Mr. Niles came to Toronto fairly frequently, he couldn't not do so. But I felt that I had excellent relationships with the other officers in Toronto, and they were probably kept good by non-direct contact.

Q: And did you have a fair amount of direct relationship with thOffice of the Special Trade Representative, the Commerce Department...

HALL: Some, but again, I was a subordinate player. Their contacts had to be with Ottawa. If USTR had called the provincial premier, believe me, that would have been a major bad move, and they understood that, and that didn't happen. Sometimes they wanted to but then wisdom prevailed. I and occasionally Mr. Niles dealt with the Premier.

Q: But occasionally they perhaps would call up, in Ottawa, say, thMinister of Trade...

HALL: Oh, by all means, and would not understand why the Minister of Trade would not call the Premier. There are rules within Canada that aren't written down. You always have to keep your eye on the objective in Canada. And subordinate tactics to the objective.

Q: Anything else about your time in Toronto? That was about threyears?

HALL: Yes, three years, and it was the three years from the beginnings of serious talk about free trade, basically to the conclusion of the agreement. It was also three years during which the so-called Meech Lake event occurred, the sort of nonstop interwoven questions about the relationships between the provinces and the federal authorities and the French-English issue. It was all interwoven during the Mulroney administration. There was a lot of activity in those areas.

The French-English thing I have always regarded as a tiny game the Canadians play for the consumption of foreigners. It has no real meaning for them. But the provincial-federal relationship is meat and potatoes. And it is never stable, it is constantly in flux, somehow. It is constantly being redefined. And one of the interesting things I have found as an observer of Canadian affairs, was to watch how that issue was played. And again, being in the largest, most colorful province, and the most negative province, I had a front row seat. That and what to do about the elephant to the south, those are the real issues. I happened to be there at a time when both were very much active.

Q: You mention that the free trade agreement had just come out. Of course, it had a lot of history, too, in the sense of the automotive agreement going back 20 years earlier.

HALL: Oh, of course. And with major investments across the border,it's hard to know what major Canadian corporation is really Canadian.

Q: How about agricultural tradwas that a problem which you had to deal with? I know occasionally there are problems with potatoes, or carrots, or whatever.

HALL: Problems with timber, problems with fish... there are a lot of problems and those usually occurred more in the western provinces. Now, fisheries were sometimes off the eastern coast, but not in our area. Sometimes we would comment on how those problems were handled, but the real negotiations were Washington to Ottawa. And again, one must always remember that Ottawa had also to negotiate with the provinces on international trade issues.

Q: How about acid rain and environmental issues, Great Lakes, water quality, and so on?

HALL: That is very hard, but again, I think it was a more active issue before my time. Not that it was inactive, but it had been a more emotional issue before my time, for want of other issues. And by the time I came on the scene, all of a sudden there was this trade issue and others had to move aside to make room for it. Also, I think the science on acid rain, and I would not claim to expertise, but my understanding was that the science on acid rain was very clear in the '50s and '60s, became rather confused in the '70s and '80s, and remains confused today. It was easier to be adamant earlier, and it's more difficult to be adamant now. So yes, those issues were there, but I can't say that they were a source of enormous concern. We did occasionally report on them, but I think other issues were more important on my watch, anyway.

Q: Okay, John, is there anything we should say about your four years in Canada, because we can't forget the Canadian Defense College for 9 months...

HALL: No, I think we've pretty much covered it.

Q: They in 1990 you went back to Switzerland as deputy chief omission. First, how did that come about?

HALL: Well, when I was bidding as I left Toronto I certainly put it very high on my wish list. I felt that with prior service at the post, two of the languages, being a senior officer with some managerial experience, I had a fairly broad array of experiences overall... I thought I

was probably a pretty darn good candidate. I later discovered that Ambassador Gildenhorn ran across my name on the third list of possibilities that he was given, that he had rejected everyone happily on the first two lists, after meeting each of them. One day I got a call from the desk officer here, calling Toronto, saying get down here for an interview in the morning. So I came down, interviewed, and got the job. I think it worked out marvelously. Mr. Gildenhorn was a political appointee, a very prominent local businessman in the Washington area in property development. An absolutely marvelous gentleman with an absolutely marvelous wife. George Bush told me when I met him, after he'd vacated the White House and came through Switzerland and I was showing him around, he said that in hiring Mr. Gildenhorn he got two for the price of one, and he really did. Mrs. Gildenhorn was as much the ambassador and as good an ambassador as Mr. Gildenhorn was a very fine gentleman, a gentleman of unimpeachable integrity. And I think we worked extremely well as a team.

Q: The Swiss have, on occasion, not been so blessed with American ambassadors, and have been critical, in many cases, reasonably so. Did they appreciate how good he was?

HALL: I think that was quite evident. He was much admired, much sought after, very much welcome... I think particularly when he left in February of 1993, the farewells just didn't stop. He had a horrible schedule of people wanting to do nice things for them. They were a superb couple for the role, very much appreciated both by the private and the public sectors, and by Swiss society at large. He was very highly regarded. He was interested in the broad issues but he did not involve himself in the details, which I think was the correct posture. But he was certainly interested in the broad issues and knowledgeable about them. He used his contacts here in Washington well, and of course he had contacts that neither I nor others of us on the professional staff could possibly know, or assume, ourselves. He was an honest broker in both directions, and everyone knew that.

Q: He was regarded well, obviously by you, but also by the staff athe embassy?

HALL: Yes. Universally. An extremely effective - again, I must emphasize - an extremely effective ambassadorial couple. And effective in all spheres, including back here. He did not overuse his access to the top levels, but when he needed it, there was no hesitation.

Q: You were there from 1990 to 1993. That was obviously the perioof the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, the end of the Cold War...

HALL: The invasion occurred while we were airborne flying, in fact, to Bern. So we were there right from the outset. It was a very interesting time to be there, because the Swiss do not always rush to engage themselves in contentious international issues. Yet this was an issue that was not altogether far from home, either physically or psychologically, and it was an issue that certainly captured the attention of the whole world for an extended period of time. It was obviously a very dangerous issue, especially for them being as close to the scene of the action as they are. And I think they were acutely worried about it in ways that maybe they don't worry much about a lot of other international occurrences.

What I thought made it particularly interesting was that, at the very moment when what we came to call Desert Shield and then Desert Storm were playing themselves out, CNN was arriving in Switzerland. At first you heard that there was some American television news channel that was available in the major hotels. Then eventually you learned that a few big banks somehow had this coming into their offices on the television. And then you heard that the Swiss press had found a way to tap into this thing. And then various ministries that you might visit around town obviously were watching this. It was almost week by week that you heard that it had encroached itself on some other part of Switzerland. The whole country was agog. This was a real major fad, and the Swiss are not much for fads. But this phenomenon appeared on the scene at the time the whole Kuwait-Iraq thing was unfolding. And I was profoundly struck by its power. I was not seeing the equivalent here, I was seeing it there, by its ability to dominate people's thoughts.***

Q:It's the ninth of January, 1998. John, we were talking about your assignment as deputy chief of mission in Bern, and we were particularly talking about the “CNN Effect,” if I may call it that, at the time of Desert Storm. Do you have anything more the say about that?

HALL: Well, it became amusing because courtesy of CNN, we not infrequently found ourselves carrying messages to the Swiss government which were already overtaken by events on the ground in Kuwait. We would go in with what we thought was the very hottest news and of course they could one-up us because they had CNN at the time and we didn't. In fact it took us until well after Desert Storm was launched to get a direct connection ourselves. So we were operating at a real disadvantage at a period when we were having a lot of interactions with some elements of the Swiss government. And I think Peter Arnett really was the U.S. ambassador for a long period.

Q: What were we trying to get the neutral Swiss to do, and to whaextent did we have success in doing it?

HALL: During the period of Desert Shield, of course, we were simply trying to convince them that we were the more pure and the other side was the more tainted. We didn't ask for anything at all.

The minute that Desert Storm broke, we went in with really the only request that we made of them during the whole conflict, and that was simply an acknowledgment of geography. To get personnel and equipment from our bases in Germany to Italy or directly to the scene of the action, we needed access to Swiss airspace and we needed access to the Swiss rail network simply to transit Switzerland. And so the only request we made of Switzerland we made on the day of Desert Storm, and that was that we be granted a blanket clearance for military flights in both directions and the use the Swiss network to convey cargoes by rail from north to south and back again. We knew that there would be a time when we would want to move wounded and other equipment and supplies northward just as much as we now wanted to move it southward. Our request was for that. In the

case of the trains, we wanted to send our uniformed personnel on the trains and we were prepared to have our wagons attached to Swiss engines, and we were prepared to have Swiss customs or military or any other personnel ride on the trains, that didn't bother us. But these were the two things we asked them for.

I was charg# at the instant that the instruction came iwe knew what was coming, we knew what we'd senand when I went up to the Foreign Ministry to convey my request, which was one under other circumstances that the Swiss would have thought long and hard about and very likely not granteit was instant yes. And I am absolutely convinced that the reason that it was instant yes was Peter Arnett. That the fascination with CNN had led them to focus on that as their essentially sole source of credible information. We were handing them all sorts of commentary officially, which was not credible. What they got from CNN I think they thought to be credible, and I think probably 99 percent because it was a new toy and one percent because it was “on the ground.” In any case, I think Peter Arnett had laid the groundwork. The Swiss government, the Swiss press, the Swiss public at large at that moment had already decided that Saddam Hussein was evil, that what he had done was wrong, that it was so wrong that it was absolutely right that the rest of the world should beat up on him. And the groundwork for the demarche that was carried that day was not done by me or any of my staff in the months preceding, though heaven knows we were active, it was done by Peter Arnett. And as a result we got everything we asked for. The only thing we didn't get was concurrence in writing. But it worked. It worked beautifully. And we never had a problem.

Q: Did we present our request in writing?

HALL: Yes. It was never answered in writing, and we were told thait wouldn't be, we didn't expect it to be.

Q: And that was sufficient. It allowed us to do what we needed tdo.

HALL: It worked. We had the armed personnel on trains. They did put customs officials on there, it was strictly pro forma. They put one in the cab of each engine; they never looked at what was following behind. At their request, we did those transits only at nighttime. But other than that we got everything we'd asked for, and had it not been for Peter Arnett and CNN we would have had a much more difficult time. But the groundwork was laid, the moral rights and wrongs were very clearly established by the time we came in. It was a very powerful lesson in how a nonofficial entity can impact on foreign policy. Not when it chooses to, but when the circumstances are favorable. In this particular instance, CNN and Peter Arnett were determining Swiss public opinion every bit as much as I suspect they were determining American public opinion during that brief interval. And I think there are lessons in that experience as I saw it play out in one little place at one little moment that we as a profession are still pondering.

Q: Still, the role of Ambassador Gildenhorn or your role... there was still a role. The role was not simply to convey information or analysis...

HALL: I think so, but in this particular instance, one of the rare cases where we went to the Swiss and asked for something concrete and something to put them on the line... something that could publicly force them to take a stance on an issue, I think the heavy lifting had been done by others.

Q: What were the other issues you were seized with in the time thayou were in Switzerland?

HALL: Well, it's a happy relationship, as you yourself will recall, or by and large a happy relationship. One of the major issues was international criminal activity, money laundering. Switzerland had come under some criticism prior to my arrival, and it was very much a lively issue during my time, both for Congress and the Treasury, in terms of their attitude, how they handled alleged instances of money laundering, their internal controls, and so on.

We had a delegation at one point where a senior U.S. Treasury official came over and read them the riot act. There were various other public and private efforts to convince them to exercise more control, more surveillance over large money movements. We, of course, wanted clear-cut, positive, decisive action, quickly. The Swiss moved, in the end, at their own rhythm. And I think on my watch they moved a long way toward where we wanted them to be, but they had to do it their way, which is legitimate. They had to do it in such a way that they could carry their publics with them. I don't think that there was any question but that they understood that abuses were occurring, that they needed to tighten up. The question was how to get from here to there. We wanted instant action, we got results, but it took some time.

Q: Did our desire for instant action, immediate solutions to problems sometimes make it delay the process that they were going through?

HALL: I'm not sure that it delayed it from their point of view. What we were trying to do was to speed them up, and they were not about to be speeded. They had domestic concerns that they had to placate. We often felt frustrated. But I was pretty convinced throughout that they understood the gravity and the extent of the problem both in a material and in a public relations sense. They did not like the image that they had been given publicly in this country.I think they realized that they had to do something, they knew roughly what it had to be, and it was our role, really, to push them.

This occurred at two levels. It occurred at the diplomatic level, with government trying to influence government, but it also occurred at the micro level, in terms of individual instances, of individual actions. And there our legal attach#, our DEA representation, thCustoms representation in Vienna, which was responsible for Switzerland, they were extremely active on individual cases, sharing a good deal of information on individual cases, of things that they thought had happened, that they alleged had happened. So we were working with them at two levels. But one of the consequences of that issue, which is a permanent issue in the relationship, whereas I think Desert Shield and Desert

Storm came and eventually went, is that probably the most active single part of the entire embassy in terms of outside activity — raising dust, doing things with a capital “T” — was the collection of what I think of as police agencies. The work of the political and economic sections, the work of the Defense Attach# Office, the work of the agriculture office, the commerce office, and so on, those tended to be somewhat more tranquil, more steady, more predictable. It was in the legal attach# and the DEA and the Customs area where I felt particularly that there was an enormous amount of pressure coming out of Washington, there were staff increases on the ground from very small to a little bit larger than very small, but still any increase is noteworthy. There was a lot of interactions with the Swiss Federal Police, the Swiss customs, and other Swiss officialdom, a lot of information passing largely in one direction. A lot of very informal pleading and cajoling and urging and requesting, all of which the ambassador and I monitored very closely but did not require our personal attention. And was handled, I think, well. There were good people. In my view, I saw in Bern more concentrated activity in this, for lack of a better term, array of police entities than I was accustomed to seeing in other assignments. I gather that that phenomenon has in fact played out in some other locations.

Q: The problem sometimes with law enforcement agencies is a lack of information. Post management - the ambassador, the DCM - don't always know what's happening until pretty late when there's a problem, when it's pretty hard to deal with. But you felt that you generally were able to monitor, that you generally were aware of what was going on?

HALL: I think we were, and I think it was because of the esteem in which the ambassador was held by his own staff. I think another person in the ambassadorial role might have had a great deal of difficulty being informed by his subordinates, what they were about. This ambassador didn't. The agencies had very good people assigned, but they had both an affection for and a respect for the ambassador. I think they understood that they were dealing in a dangerous area, they didn't want to get caught out, and I think they genuinely

wanted to keep him informed. It was a tribute to the man and had we had the other kind of ambassador there, which you alluded to earlier, it may not have worked so well.

Q: A lot of these issues that we're talking about in the police or law enforcement areas involve Swiss bank accounts, bank secrecy, alleged money laundering. The other area that has certainly come to the fore in recent times, and I'm curious whether it was a subject at all while you were there, is the question of Holocaust accounts at the time of the Second World War, which has become a very prominent public and intergovernmental subject in the last couple of years. Did that come up at the time you were there?

HALL: It was not there as an issue at the time, Ray. You will recall when you and I were there, and certainly when I was there later as DCM, this was one of those things that when you got to know someone very well, they might make a comment about. But it was not discussed publicly. Openly, it was something that everyone understood but simply didn't enunciate. It was not an issue with a capital “I.” That's all come up since that time. And indeed, Mr. Gildenhorn is Jewish himself; he is very well linked in to the American Jewish community and others who are active in this, and in discussions he and I have had since we've returned to the States, he is obviously very much involved with at least staying aware of the inner workings of that issue. He, of course, had excellent contacts with Swiss officialdom, with the Swiss banking community, and so on, he had also contacts with the American Jewish community. I'm privileged to have conversations with him from time to time, and he has some interesting insights into it, but when I was there it was not a policy issue. We had other things that were issues, but this was not.

Q: Certainly the way I recalled the situation in the early '70s when I was there with you was very much along those lines. To the extent that we thought about the Swiss role during the Second World War, I think we were aware that they benefited from accounts placed there in other ways, but they also contributed in allowing us to do some things in Switzerland... and somehow the balance was not necessarily positive, but was sort of neutral, at least, as they sought the role. That's the way I recall it from that period.

HALL: I think that's exactly right. And obviously at that moment they were caught in a very awkward geopolitical situation and I would not pretend to judge the factors. I can understand that they had to play a very careful game. How they played it was up to them.

Q: I guess the next thing to talk about is the structure of the embassy itself. You mention the police representatives, the law enforcement agency representatives, were the ones who were really involved in the important day-to-day matters...

HALL: Very difficult ones in some cases.

Q: Let's talk about the reporting. What did the other people in thembassy do?

HALL: The other members of staff were certainly busy, but I think the police agencies had a whole array of individual difficult issues and circumstances to deal with and it almost seems that one was put to bed and two others would come along. The other activities of the embassy - its consular activities, its reporting activities, and public relations activities and so on - simply percolated along, there were certainly always things to do.

Particularly on the public affairs side, the Gildenhorns were very active. Mrs. Gildenhorn was on the board of the Kennedy Center at the time. They used their connections into the artistic communities in America very well in a society which could respond very well to those overtures. She used her Kennedy Center connections very well, there were Kennedy Center honors nights in Bern. She had the president of the Center over at one time for public appearances and to talk about the facilities and so on. A lot of things in the artistic areshows for burgeoning American artists in the area and so on, but they were very active in cultural public affairs in a sense. He did a certain amount of public speaking, but a great deal of public appearances in support of whatever objective and sometimes just for the fun of it. And the Swiss reacted very well to him and to her.

During my time there Treasury closed down its one-man operation, which surprised me, but they had higher priorities elsewhere: Eastern Europe was opening and they needed

to deploy their resources there. Agriculture pulled out its attach# although they left a FSN behind; I don't know if that FSN is still there. Again, the function of the Agricultural attach# office, I think both while you and I were there and certainly when I went back, was not absolutely vital to U.S. interestit was a cut that we could absorb easily enough. In Geneva the U.S. has its major mission to the U.N., but we also have a small consular office, which once was an actual consulate. That was closed on my watch, that was one officer and two FSNs.

Q: Which at the time was attached to the embassy, and not to thmission to the U.N.?

HALL: That's correct. It was an appendage to our consular section, so a consular agency was opened in its stead, which I happen to think was the right way to go. There were obviously not significant resource savings when you're talking about a staff that small, but on the other hand it's a small country and communications are absolutely superb.

Q: Who headed up the consular agency?

HALL: We engaged a local resident American, a retired gentleman who I believe has since passed away. A man well-known among the American community in Geneva. I think that worked out very well in the end. Of course the American community there obviously was distressed, they thought that we were abandoning them, they didn't believe that a consular agency could provide the services they wanted, materials, documentation. It turns out that the agency could. So it was a modest dollar savings, but I think it was an unnecessary office and the consular agency performs the function very well. Since then, of course Zurich has closed as well, and likewise become a consular agency.

Q: Zurich was still open when you were there? The decision had nobeen made to close it?

HALL: The story as I saw it was that at a moment when we were being asked to open up umpteen posts in countries that hadn't been countries, places which we felt were priority locations, there was obviously a hunt for resources - it had to be. Again, with Zurich

communications were very good, the embassy was a full-service operation, staffed in such a way that I think it was widely accepted that we could absorb the workload. Indeed you will recall that many times personnel from the embassy went to Zurich city to do business without ever involving the Zurich consulate. And that's true in all sections. There was an inspection of the posts in Switzerland in 1991. And the inspectors, of course, came in with the understanding that resources had to be found somewhere for these new countries. So they came in very suspicious. They essentially decreed the closure of the Geneva consular office and we managed to get the consular agency in its place. They took a look at the Zurich consulate and concluded that it was contributing nothing worthwhile, that it had the potential to do so if the post would do reporting. It was not then doing it. So the inspection reported that if the Zurich consulate proves in some reasonable period of time that it can report then perhaps it should not be closed, but if doesn't, it should.

Q: What sort of reporting were the inspectors particularlinterested in?

HALL: This was all based on the presence of the banking community, and the idea was to work them more assiduously than they were being worked at the time. The principal officer caught fire, and I think really made some very serious efforts to establish those kinds of contacts, and to do reporting. That was a function that was alien to the person's background up to that point. That officer departed fairly shortly thereafter for reassignment, and for a full year there was no principal officer assigned. The deputy was acting and only very late in the game was given the actual title, and then was pulled for reassignment. The sum total of which, over a year or two, despite some serious efforts on the part of both the outgoing and then the acting principal officer, not a whole lot of reporting came out of post. The reporting on the Zurich banking community was being done by the Economic Section in Bern, and that didn't change. So it certainly didn't surprise me when the pressure to close the Zurich consulate became very intense. They'd been given no chance, if any, to pass the test. And actually I think the closure of the Zurich consulate engendered less public relations uproar than the closure of the Geneva consular office because in Geneva

you had a much larger American citizen community, and they had and used connections in Washington.

Q: I assume that not much political reporting was done by anybody.

HALL: I think there was not much to do. Our political officer at that time had very good contacts, especially among parliamentarians, and there were some vocal individuals there who made a lot of noise and not much difference. Covering Swiss politics was an interesting thing to do at that time but in fact it was sort of a forlorn, fruitless activity. It was amusing. The political officer really spent the vast part of his time conveying demarches on this U.N. issue, or that European issue, some science issues, and so on. He was walking back and forth to the foreign ministry all the time.

Q: On the economic side, you managed to touch on the role of the Treasury representative and obviously Swiss banks and private Swiss economic institutions have a lot of interests around the world and certainly in the United States. The government, back in my time quite a long time ago, was quite involved and engaged in international economic bodies - the OECD, GATT, whatever - in a way that it was not involved in the U.N. or NATO or any other international political institutions. The economic reporting, I thought at the time I was there, was of at least some interest to Washington agencies. Was that the case?

HALL: I think that continued to be true. I don't think there was a Treasury representative when you were there. But for so long as there was on my second tour, there was tension between the economic staff and the Treasury representative as to who had what turf. There was concern at Treasury, when their office was closed, as to whether the economic staff could pick it up or not. We never had a complaint from Treasury afterwards that they were not given adequate services. But yes, I think there definitely was a market, and you're right that is one area where the Swiss choose to be active internationally. They're also active in refugee matters, things of that sort. Humanitarian issues attract their attention. Political issues as such they generally do shy away from.

Q: They have a very professional diplomatic service, and for a relatively small country they're in rather a large number of capitals all around the world, and they have on occasion represented our interests. When you were there, where were they representing our interests? In Teheran, I suppose...

HALL: Teheran and Cuba, if I remember. Teheran was the only active one. And on my watch, if I remember, there was not much activity other than consular - individual American citizen services. There were established mechanisms for that. The head of our Consular Section would keep me informed, but there were no real problems. We were simply a transmission link in a chain. The issues were looking after people who got thrown in jail, or redoing the passports, what to do about a former FSN at our embassy who was being denied some sort of benefit that they were entitled to, things like that.

Q: And in Havana we have the U.S. Interests Section, which pretty much does everything itself, even though it nominally still comes under the Swiss.

HALL: I think that's right, and for that reason we in the embassy really experienced no connections there at all. But the system that seemed to work was that communications from Washington went to us first, then to the Swiss government, then to Teheran. Communications from Teheran went first to the Swiss in Bern, then to the Swiss embassy in Washington, then to the Department. So there were two separate avenues, but we were part of only one avenue.

Q: So you asked the questions...

HALL: But we didn't necessarily hear the answer. We didn't know that the answers had been given, so it was a little bit awkward in that sense.

Q: The Swiss didn't get involved in representing us in either Kuwaior Baghdad.

HALL: No.

Q: The last period that you were there, I'm not sure how long it was, you were probably charg#. At the beginning of the Clinton administration...

HALL: It was about six months.

Q: You enjoyed that period? Anything significant about that, othethan that you were the chief of mission?

HALL: I don't think that there were any major problems obreakthroughs that occurred, it was a relatively quiet period.

Q: Had the new ambassador arrived before you left?

HALL: No. I turned the post over to the chief of the Consular Section as charg#. We had a number of grade one officers on staff and it was, I think, the conclusion of us all that he was best positioned to take on the task and he in turn was charg# for another six monthI contributed six, he contributed six. He turned the post over to the new DCM, who was charg# for a couple of months, who then turned it over to the late, lamented Mr. Lawrence. So there was a very long interval there. My suspicion is that when I had left the scene, when the interval had become so embarrassingly long, that the Swiss probably started to say snotty little things. They know us so well that they don't need explanations, and they can figure out what is going on. I never had the feeling for the six months that I was charg# that the relationship suffered for the absence of an ambassador, with the exception that we had lost a particularly effective one. But our dealings with private and public entities did not suffer at all.

Q: Well, that, I think, was largely because you had been there a considerable period of time and they knew you well. They also recognized that the change from a Republican to a Democratic administration in Washington was going to take a while.

HALL: I think they probably know us well enough to know how to read the signals.

Q: But as it went closer to a year, and beyond a year, I bet thawas a long time.

HALL: After I was gone I suspect there were some awkward moments,yes.

Q: They also knew that there was some controversy about LarrLawrence before he took his post in Switzerland.

HALL: Of course.

Q: Later on, after his death, it was a different story. Anythinelse about your time in Switzerland?

HALL: I don't know of any particular high points that we haven't covered. A very comfortable assignment, obviously, a busy little post and a fascinating country. I think we left things there in very good condition.

Q: And it seems to me it was a terrific assignment for the Department, for you, and it made a lot of sense. It was good for you being there at that time.

HALL: Sure. I think it made a lot of sense in a lot of ways.

Q: So you came back to Washington at that time, and did what?

HALL: I came back at that point with 31 years of service under my belt. I was an MC and had no expectations of getting any further promotions. So I came back intending to retire in four more years, as I have recently done. I came back into the Bureau of Personnel, this time as the director of recruitment and examination, a job which I really was interested in. With having had that job, I felt I had then had every job I'd ever really wanted in the Foreign Service.

I was probably a strong candidate for the position because I had a broad base of experience in personnel management, but I also felt confident in taking it on in that, having

no further aspirations in the Service, whatever responsibilities it eventually proved to entail I could deal with completely honestly. I had no reason not to do the right thing. I felt that was an area of activity where perhaps we hadn't in recent years always done the smartest thing possible. So I came back, I think, with a mindset that permitted me to approach that job in a way that some other officers might not have. Whether that was good or bad or neutral is for others to determine.

Q: It must have been somewhat of a dilemma in a sense that reduced hiring, cutbacks, presumably reduced recruitment was also part of what was happening in that arena.

HALL: Very much so. There were resource reductions, to be sure. We had a very noteworthy budget cutback over the course of two or three years, the number of examiners in BEX went down rather dramatically. The task I was confronted with was how to get the machine working in those circumstances. There was indeed one full year when we did no recruitment at all. Of course, that happened also to be the full year when we did no hiring. But it became that extreme. The organization lost probably 10, 12 percent of its positions on my watch and 15 percent of its budget. We managed to keep the work on track despite that.

Q: The priority, I think, during the time was to try to increasdiversity here, minority hiring, is that right?

HALL: Oh, that's certainly right, it's been a long time coming for the Department, as we both know. And I think it will probably be a problem for a long time to come. I don't think I've found any easy answers. I think the conclusion I came to after observing the process and getting to know some of the players, after a certain amount of travel and reacquainting myself with American academe to some small degree. The conclusion that I came to is that it's a conundrum that we probably are not capable of solving without outside help. If we are not willing to bring in some sort of outside consultant to coach us through it, I don't think we will ever be able to do it satisfactorily. We do not have the breadth or the vision

to be able to find our way out of this particular box alone, if there is indeed a way to get out of it. I also think that bringing in outside help would be a very wise move politically. It would be one more evidencand sometimes we have great difficulty producing credible evidencthat we give a hoot.

Q: Did we consider doing that?

HALL: Well, I put the proposal forward at various times in various ways, and there always were budgetary or other considerations. I must say that I drew the conclusion that one of the factors that prevented it from happening might have been the risk. That is to say that to some degree we would lose control over how we did things and what our own priorities were, and that was found distasteful by some.

Q: You must have had contact with a number of people we did hire during the period when you were there to recruit, examine, and hire. Do you have sort of an overall impression of their caliber, quality, and the standard that they were meeting?

HALL: We were getting some very good people. I think the Service has changed since you and I came in. But overall the commitment, the level of interest, the knowledge, the cleverness of the people that we were bringing in, was quite impressive. We filter people out largely at the oral interview, which is conducted by BEX. That's the critical phase in the selection process. It's possible for a single day to fake it, and some people do, in terms of interpersonal skills, the ability to work with others, and so on. How you use words, how you use language... Some people, if they make up their mind to be someone else for a full day, can do it. And we probably both have run into a few such people overseas. So you can get through our system and turn out to be a bad hire. That certainly happens. I don't think it happens, statistically, very often.

I was quite content, by and large, with the caliber of people we were looking at. They are older people, certainly, than when I came in, they are people with more paper qualifications. I think very competent people. The thing that worries me more, I think, is

whether 35 years from now the Service will be able to satisfy those individuals. And I'm thinking now about evolutions that occurred during my 35 years, CNN being but a small part of them. When I went out to Bordeaux as a junior officer at post I had an array of responsibilities that was far broader, I had far more leeway, the post collectively had far more authority to do things than is the case now. And I think if we continue to hire very bright people and then send them abroad to be chained and constrained, I'm not sure that's necessarily the right thing. I don't know if it will play out that way. But for now we are continuing to hire very bright people. I worry that we'll find, over time, that we are hiring people who are too bright for what we can give them.

Q: The written examination was given some of the time, not all of thtime, for budget reasons.

HALL: Well, if you're not hiring there's not much point to examining. Yes, it was a sometime thing. We continued the oral assessments pretty much throughout my watch, although there did come a period when the pipeline absolutely ran out. When people take the written examination, you're conducting oral examinations for the passers for a year or more afterwards, and eventually we did run into a dry spell.

We had a plan for that period that, because of some changes in personalities, didn't really work out as I'd hoped it would. One of the things that I'd become aware of as director of the office was that we'd been using the same selection technology for half a century. The written examination, done for us by the Educational Testing Service, the oral assessment, highly structured, observed by outsiders, critiqued and picked away at by outsiders, but still basically the same technology. It occurred to me that perhaps there were other technologies out there which might be worth our consideration. And most especially, perhaps there might be other technologies which might help us with our diversity problem while not undercutting our effort to attract the best available people. We had a notion and got approval for it that during the period when we knew that BEX would not be examining, we would significantly reduce the number of examiners, reduce them even further than

they'd been reduced, and use those who remained to do a very comprehensive study of options. Actually begin to do some of this outside consulting kind of stuff, but we would have the staff in-house to control and orchestrate it all.

As I gave up the directorship all the pieces, I thought, were in place for that, but there were a series of interregna in different positions, including my own, and it never really came to pass. I think it would have been very helpful if that had, in fact, occurred. I don't know what we would have found. We would have had to be prepared to face up to some conclusions that were not comfortable to us, we would have lost some control, but it had within it at least the potential to solve a number of problems simultaneously. And if nothing else, if we ended up validating our half-century old process, that would have been useful, too.

Q: Is there anything else we should talk about in terms orecruitment?

HALL: After that assignment I still had some time before I reached my 35 years, so the personnel bureau proposed that I coordinate the so-called Foreign Service Job Analysis Project, which is just now coming to its conclusion. Something to draw on the experience in recruitment and examination. I did that and retired from that function.

Q: How long did you do that?

HALL: Oh, I was involved in it for a little over a year, all told, from the initial inception stages through much of its conclusion, although I passed the final stages of it on to my successor.

Q: And that's an effort to try to determine and identify what ourequirements are?

HALL: Yes, it's something that we last had done in 1983, if I remember. There was a feeling that it might not be a bad idea to take another look at some of our central personnel management processes.

End of interview